

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE OF HENRY N. JOHNSON.

BY THOMAS MEEHAN.

In the central part of Germantown, on what is known as "The battle-ground," is "Upsal," the estate of John Johnson, the descendant of Dirk Jansen, an early settler in that borough. The residence is some five hundred feet west of the celebrated Chew Mansion, in which a number of British troops fortified themselves in the war of the Revolution to resist the advance of General Washington's army towards Philadelphia. In front of John Johnson's house the cannon were placed that were used by the American army in the attack on the Chew House. The estate was known as "Upsal," a name associated with the great Swedish botanist Linnæus; but in this case given from its being the birthplace of Mrs. John Johnson.

A love of botany, or at least of rare trees and plants, must have been a trait in the character of John Johnson, for when the writer first knew it, about 1856, it was, in many regards, a botanic garden, in respect to the number of rare herbaceous plants growing there, while some of the finest specimens of rare trees to be found about the city, adorned the grounds. At that time it contained a specimen of the European silver fir, which the writer measured and found over ninety feet high; a very large deciduous cypress, by examining which the late Dr. Engelmann made his first discovery of the fact that at least one coniferous plant imitated amentaceous plants in advancing considerably male flower buds in the fall; magnolias, and especially a specimen of the American yew, which remains to this day probably the finest specimen of this plant in the world. These trees, according to the statement of Henry N., the son and subject of this sketch, were planted by John Johnson about the year 1800.

Henry N. was born on the 20th of May, 1820. He completed his education in the old Germantown Academy in 1839. He was noted among his schoolmates for a studious disposition, and in the classics, literature, and mathematics, particularly, kept at the head of his class. Entering manhood he started, in connection with a friend, the business of a bookseller, on Chestnut Street, near Seventh, in Philadelphia, which was ultimately abandoned. A physical infirmity which afflicted him from birth, rendered

him averse to city life, and after declining business, he took on himself the care of the estate—the garden, especially, receiving his special attention. Physically strong, he loved to apply himself to garden work, and a large number of rare trees and plants were added from time to time, and set out with his own hands. Some of the finest specimens of the Japan cedar—*Cryptomeria Japonica*—are here, and the only known plant of the mammoth *Sequoia* in existence around Philadelphia. The tree, although not seeming to like our hot summers, is growing here in fair health—all from his planting and care. He would have disclaimed the title of botanist, but his love for trees and plants, and the great amount of knowledge he possessed regarding them, was very unusual in a mere lover of gardening. He always took great interest in the progress of natural history, and, in conversation with the writer, subjects connected with the Academy of Natural Sciences, showing an interest in its welfare, were frequent topics.

He continued his interest in the oversight of the family estate till about 1865, when it was divided, and he took his separate share. About this time he married a lady of Philadelphia with whom he had been long acquainted, and went to housekeeping on Girard Avenue, near Fairmount Park, in which beautiful spot, among the trees and flowers, he would spend most of his time. He died on the 30th of August, 1879, leaving the use of all he was possessed of to his wife during her lifetime, and to revert to the Academy on her decease.